

Interview H0203: Taring, Jigme Sumten Wangpo Namgyal ['phreng ring, 'jig med sum rten dbang po rnam rgyal], (India, 1992) : Part No. 2 of 2

Jigme Taring was eldest son of the half-brother of the Maharaja of Sikkim and an important aristocratic official in the Tibetan government. He discusses in detail the structure and composition of Laja Office including where its revenue comes from and how it was spent. He also discusses in detail being in charge of designing and building the new palace called Tagten Mingyur and how he got promoted to the rank of dzasa. He also explains how he worked in the Dalai Lama's Private Office shooting movies and taking photos and assisting with the Dalai Lama's foreign communications. In addition, Taring explains in detail about managing his estate and miser including how law cases were settled among the miser. Finally, there is a discussion of a law cases in the Surkhang, Sambo and Yuthok families. Taring also explains the different hat buttons worn by the 7 ranks of Tibetan government officials.

The income of the [Laja](#) was mainly used for expenditures for religious affairs. Their sources of income came through four different Shepön [tib. she dpon] who were in charge of collecting butter lease fees [in different areas]: the Droshö Shepön [tib. gro shod she dpon], the Nagtsang Shepön [tib. nag tshang she dpon], the Yangjen Shepön [tib. yangs can she dpon], the Drigu Shepön [tib. gri gu she dpon] and the Nyekor Shepön [tib. nye skor she dpon]. These Shepön collected lease fees in butter from their area and sent them to Lhasa.

The major income in butter was collected by the Droshö Shepön from the [Tö](#) area and was given to Drepung. The government had to serve tea daily to all the 5,500 monks in Sera, 7,700 monks in Drepung and 3,300 Ganden. This meant that the government had to give tea and butter for the daily preparation of tea from the office of the [Laja](#). As already mentioned, the butter collected from [Tö](#) Area went to Drepung, while the butter collected from the Northern region went to Sera, and the butter from the Eastern region went to

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Ganden monastery. The butter from the Nyekor Shepön [the nearby areas] was sent to Lhasa and used for [tonggo](#) [rites] for 21 days to provide tea three times daily and porridge two times daily during the Mönlam Prayer Festival.

Besides this, every month the Government had to make offerings of Tongchö [tib. stong mchod], (one thousand offerings of butter lamps, [torma](#), incense, flowers and water offerings). There were 3 categories of this: elaborate, medium, and small. The elaborate was offered on the 15th of every month, the medium was offered on the 8th of every month and the small was offered on the 30th. There were also three differences in the size and quality of these lamps. There were also additional tongchö on religiously auspicious occasions like the 4th Tibetan month (tib. Sagadawa [sa ga zla ba]) commemorating the Buddha's birth, death and the enlightenment anniversary, and on the 22nd of the 9th Tibetan month (tib. Lhabab Düchen [lha bab dus chen]), the festival commemorating the Buddha coming to the world, the 4th of the 6th Tibetan month (tib. Drukpa Tseshi [drug pa tshes bzhi]), commemorating the Buddha giving the teaching on the Four Noble Truths, and on Tibetan New Year. Besides these, other rituals were also performed.

Q

Was the [Laja](#) responsible for all rituals performed by the government?

A

Actually, there was a separate office to handle religious ceremonies called the Shabten Lekhung [tib. zhabs brtan las khungs]. However, both the [Laja](#) and the Shabten Lekhung had their own specific duties. For example, some of the occasions on New Years, Sagadawa and Drukpa Tseshi were handled by the [Laja](#). During these occasions they brought all the empty lamps from the main statues in the [Tse](#) [Potala] and the [Jokhang](#). There was an official record book which mentioned the amount of empty lamps from each of these places and according to this, they would bring in melted butter like it was water in large cauldrons that were normally used to store water. All the empty butter lamps called Khamsum Tsomchen [tib. khams gsum tshom chen] were lined up in the hall and then they were filled up. They appointed a person to supervise this operation. At one time they would melt about 20 to 30 butter loads and they would pour the melted butter with a large ladle. Then nearby small monasteries would come to get their grant.

Q

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Which small neighboring monasteries?

A

You know, like Drib [Tsecholing](#) [tib. grib tshe mchog gling]. Small monasteries scattered around. They would come with their list for the [tonggo](#) [tib. gtong deb] and ask for their payment.

Q

Payments like what?

A

Like butter, tea and rice.

Q

Were these grants of assistance given according to traditional conventions, rules laid down long a long time ago, each monastery with a fixed amount of aid in tea, butter, and food?

A

Yes, it was a traditional practice. They had a list that mentioned what aid they should receive: the amount and varieties. So the government must give them the products as mentioned in their written list. For example, during the Mönlam festival they were given tea and porridge, and likewise at Tsogjö they received the same aid. For the purpose of providing this aid, the tea from the tea custom duty [tib. ja sho] was stored in a godown underneath the [Tse](#) Deyang Shar [tib. rtse sde yangs shar]. All this tea was stored in this godown. The godown was located underneath [Tse](#) Deyang Shar. On top there was a concrete stone floor. Actually, the floor was pounded with [arka](#) and was used by the dobdob to perform the religious (cham) dance. The godown had numerous cupboards stocked with tea. Beside this, beneath the Phodrang Marpo [tib. pho brang dmar po] (the Red Palace) there were similar godowns stocked with tea.

Q

Was this normally locked?

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A

Yes.

Q

Did each cupboard have a lock?

A

Yes. When they had to take out some tea, a representative went along with the storekeeper.

Q

Were they sealed [a wax seal placed over the lock]?

A

Yes, they were sealed. Every year the [Tseja](#) and [Laja](#) took out the necessary amount of tea for religious purposes. About butter we have already discussed. About rice, there were 3 people like the [Tsöna](#) Dredrup [tib. mtsho sna 'bras sgrub], the Phari Dredrup [tib. phag ri 'bras sgrub], and the Tingkye Dredrup [tib. gting skyes 'bras sgrub] who collected the rice from their neighboring areas. Tibetan salt was regarded as very precious.

Q

They were sent or organized by the [Laja](#) personally?

A

Yes, they would barter rock salt with rice. The border villages would give this salt to their animals to keep them healthy and strong. They almost considered it a medicine and valued it highly.

Q

You mean border areas like Nepal and India?

A

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Yes. The salt was like crystal rock in appearance and it was highly valued. In return for this salt they would give rice. I don't know exactly how much they got for a specific amount of salt. However, there were 3 people who collected the rice from Bumthang [tib. 'bum thang] in Eastern Bhutan. Since Phari is closer to Patro [tib. spa spro] and Ha in Bhutan, they collected the rice from there. The collector from Tingkye got the rice from Nepal itself.

Q

Nepal doesn't have much rice, maybe the rice came from India?

A

It came from Nepal. Nepal grows rice. A little bit of rice also came from [Tö](#). This rice came from the lower region of Nyalam.

Q

Tö doesn't grow rice so they must be getting it from Nepal?

A

Yes, [Tö](#) doesn't grow rice. Most probably they got it from the Ladakh area [India]. The Nyalam Tax collector's [tib. mnya' nang [sho](#) pa] rice was not included in the Tingkye collection. The [Laja](#) office had a few thousand sacks of rice and besides that, they had loose rice that filled up a house. To make porridge, they had the barley grain flattened like bulgar [tib. nas chag]. Previously, this rice was 'beaten' [flattened] by the Police Regiment.

Q

You mean by the Police?

A

Yes. It was a traditional practice. Later, they brought a roller from Kolcutta. It was a good piece of equipment. You could adjust the machine to grind it very finely or roughly. Unless it was ground roughly, the cauldron was so huge and the fire so hot that the porridge became over cooked and it became more like a gruel. The meat for this came from Gyantse, Shigatse and those dzongs and the estates. So the tea and porridge for the monks during the Mönlam festival was arranged like this. Now the monks individually were also offered some money. In the beginning, a person named Andru Jinda [tib. a 'brug sbyin

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bdag] [Andrutsang, Gombo Tashi] had donated 3 [sho](#) as the capital. This capital increased to thousands and thousands of [dotse](#). It is called an endowment in English. From this capital, they lent money to various organizations and people with interest. After some time they would recover the original capital and keep it in reserve and let the profit circulate as loans, collecting the interest annually. Anyone who wished to distribute money as an offering to the monks during Mönlam festival had to go to the [Tse](#) to the Trungtsi. There they would be given a date on which they could make their donations. The most important donors were given a date before the 15th of the month.

Q

Who decided about the dates and so on?

A

The Trungtsi would meet and decide a date for each donor. Usually, the [Trunyichemmo](#) handled such cases.

Q

I thought the [Laja](#) handled this matter? Didn't they?

A

No, we didn't handle this. It was decided by the office in [Tse](#). Our work was just to sanction the money.

Q

From the Laja's office?

A

They had to decide and fix the dates on which the sponsors could donate their money--much earlier. It should be decided much before the Losar (New Year). On the 2nd day of New Year, they made the sitting arrangement [of the thousands of monks] and shortly after this, the donors could make their contribution. Therefore, they had to decide and fix the date by the end of 12th month. The Mönlam festival lasts for 21 days. The first day falls on the 2nd or the 3rd day of the new lunar year depending upon the astrologer's calculation. Whatever the case may be, the money left after all the expenditures for the

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Mönlam ceremony was used for the normal expenses. Let's take a small example. The government employees did not get very high wages. The butter and tea were the only wages they got in-kind. Maybe they got a little bit of barley from some other sources. From our office they got only butter and tea.

Q

Did you have to give butter and tea to the government employees?

Q

Yes, we had to give them tea and butter. They would bring a salary sanction card and we gave them tea and butter as salary in kind.

Q

Did they each get quite a lot? Or maybe a little amount?

A

The amount was quite reasonable. If you calculated according to present weights, there would be about 1/2 a kilo of butter in one piece that was cut [from a huge brick of butter] by a knife.

Q

How much did a [Shape](#) get?

A

We didn't have to give anything to the [Shape](#). For them we supplied the materials used during the Kashag's picnic and other such occasions. When I say government employees, I am referring to the ordinary employees like the people in charge of keeping cushions, and sweepers and so on.

Q

Only to the ordinary manual-labor employees, and not to the clerks and other ranking officers?

A

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Yes, the officials did not get butter and tea as salary. Instead they got estates in lieu of their services rendered to the government. It was a feudal setup like England during the Middle Ages. During feudal England, the government officials did not get any salaries but instead got land. In Tibet it was done similarly.

Q

Ordinary employees like the sweepers had to be paid in-kind?

A

Yes.

Q

How much did they receive?

A

Masons, carpenters and similar categories of workers received a fixed amount. They had a letter from the Kashag.

Q

Did each individual get a different amount according to his age?

A

Yes. From the [Laja](#), we only had to provide the expenditures incurred during religious ceremonies like the Mönlam.

Q

Did a sweeper get the same amount of wages as granted by the Kashag every year, or did he get a different amount the next year?

A

Of course, every sweeper got the same amount.

Q

How much did the sweepers get?

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A

They got a little amount of tea leaves and about 1-2 [khe](#) of butter.

Q

You mean one brick [tib. sbag chung] of tea?

A

Yes. All of the medicines of the Tibetan Medical Astrological Institute (tib. Mentsikhang [sman rtsis khang]) were also supplied by the [Laja](#) because we collected the income from the dzongs and the estates. They had revenue books from the time of Desi Sangye Gyatso, but later they didn't deliver these completely. At that time, the revenue of the [Laja](#) was acquired according to the resources of the dzongs. We would supply the things from that. The herbs of the Mentsikhang that were available in Tibet were supplied from the dzongs and the herbs that we didn't have in Tibet, we had to send staff members to procure them from India.

There were 4 [Laja](#) (heads); 2 [tsidrung](#) and 2 lay officials. The [tsidrung](#) had the rank of [khenjung](#) and the two lay officials were [rimshi](#). Under the [Laja](#) there was the head of the clerks (tib. chagdrung [phyag drung]) and under him there were 4 senior clerks [tib. bgres song].

Q

There was only one chagdrung?

A

Yes, he was the secretary. Under him there were 16 clerks (tib. jolag [jo lags]) and under them there were 6 junior clerks (tib. shauli [zha 'u li]) who would become a clerk if one of the jolag died. When they were shauli, they didn't wear the red silk ribbon in their hair braid and they had to carry the bunches of keys when we went to take out supplies. In the [Jokhang](#), there were storerooms in all the four directions and when the [Laja](#) went to take out supplies a senior clerk and 2-3 jolag would come. While walking, the shauli would bang the keys on their knees so that the sweepers in the four directions would hear this sound and prepare the lamps.

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Each door of the storeroom had three seals. The senior clerks would shout, "The seals on the door and lock are complete." [tib. sgo zam gnyis kyi dam phrug gsal lags]. Then they could break the seals. On the top of the door, there were three seals. One was red and was called Tagdam [tib. rtags dam], one was black and was called Gyabthel [tib. rgyab thel] and the third was called Guldám [tib. mgul dam]. It was the private seal worn on the neck of the [Laja](#) who came to take out the supplies. There were also three seals on the braided rope that wrapped the lock. Then we also had to go to take out planks called jenpang [tib. spyang pang] and kongpang [tib. kong pang]. The inferior planks called ahang pangleb [tib. a zhang pang leb] was provided by the Lhasa Nyertsang Treasury.

Q

The ahang pangleb was plywood, right?

A

It was just an inferior thin plank which was just four fingers. It was used for making "religious ransom" images [tib. glud] and for the base of the butter sculpture decorations during the New Year. The [Laja](#) also had an income source of round pine rafters [tib. som ril] and also birch tree planks [tib. stag pang]. All the inner positions of the government [tib. nang gi las tshan], i.e., the Tsipön, laja, tseja, shölpa, [mipön](#), the Lhasa [nyertsang](#), the sherpang [tib. bsher dpang] had an outer uniform made from red serge [tib. kha gon]. This was probably to keep the inner satin uniform clean. I heard that in the past they wore red [nambu](#) woolen cloth for that. Later, they wore red serge when the serge was available. Sometimes we even had to measure and take out the barley, meat and wood planks. At that time, the jolag would give us a kind of raw silk shawl [tib. lem thang] to wear over our uniform because it was very dusty. They would also bring a chair for us to sit on.

They had dug a pit in the butter storeroom. This was to put the melted butter in when the butter squeezed out [from its leather containers] when the weather was hot in the 4-5 month, and the time when many butter loads were piled up. This butter in the pit was used for lamps. It was really a good era [tib. skal pa bzang po] at that time. When we boiled tea in the [Laja](#) for the [Laja](#) heads and also for the clerks, they would wrap a stick with cloth and dip it in the melted butter in the pit and burn it as the fuel for making the tea. During the New Year, we could get dry fruits from the [Tseja](#) and on the 28th and the 29th, we had to go to [Deyang](#) Shar in [Tse](#) to deliver the fruit for the three days of the New Year Ceremony.

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Q

To whom did you have to deliver the fruit?

A

To the Dalai Lama's cooks (tib. sōthaba [gsol thab pa]). They received it in their laps supporting it with their monk's shawls.

Q

You didn't have any limit, right?

A

It was supposed to be a leather plate full of dry fruit and the Dalai Lama's plate was the biggest. The medium size plate was for the prime minister, the Regent, the [Shape](#) and the Tsipön. The smaller ones were for all the lay officials. The sōthaba would deliver these things. At the other ceremonies like the "worshipping of Shri Devi" [tib. dpal lha'i gzab gsol], we had to serve dry fruit.

Q

So all the herbs, dry fruit, rice and the butter for the government was supplied by the [Laja](#), right?

A

Yes.

Q

How about the barley?

A

All the barley offerings were supplied by the [Laja](#).

Q

Who would take away the leftover barley offerings?

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A

How could there be leftovers? All of them would be used.

Q

I mean who would take away the barley offered in the bowls?

A

All of these would be collected by the chief caretaker of the [Jokhang](#), the Gönyerpön [tib. dkon gnyer dpon].

Q

This was his income, right?

A

Yes. From Kham, we got dry mango [tib. a mra] and red dates [tib. chi bi kha] and from India, we got dry dates [tib. kha sur] and from [Tö](#) we receive leather loads of apricots [tib. mnga' ris kham bu]. This was delivered by the Lochagpa [tib. lo phyag pa [who annually brought tribute from Ladakh]. We also had to supply all the paper used.

Q

Who sent the Ladakh Lochagpa?

A

The Ladakh Lochagpa had this title and they would stand during the Dalai Lama's procession from [Norbulinga](#) to [Tse](#), and back [when the Dalai Lama switched residences in summer and winter].

Q

When there used to be a Ladakh King, did he send the lochagpa?

A

Probably the king sent them.

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Q

When the king was no more, who sent them?

A

The family who was obliged to send the Lochagpa sent them.

Q

How much apricots did you receive?

A

About 50-60 leather loads. The Nyalam Shopa also had to deliver these. Then we had to buy Indian goods like a kind of green dye [tib. spang], cinnabar [tib. mtshal] and azure [tib. mthing], auripigmentum [tib. ba bla], lacquer [tib. lcags rtsi], iron and also cloth.

Q

Do you mean the iron to be used for government construction?

A

Yes. At that time, people didn't deliver goods according to the revenue book. So later we kind of almost couldn't manage ourselves [tib. khungs ma 'khyol], and in the end we had to buy vegetable oil to be used for the butter lamps. It was out of the question to have a surplus.

Q

If you got the income completely, then was it enough for the supplies, right?

A

Yes. And there would be also surplus.

Q

But they didn't deliver the required things, right?

A

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Yes, we were going after these, but they still didn't deliver the whole amount. At that time, the Nyalam Shöpa also had to deliver elephant bezoar [tib. glang chen gi wang] and otter skins and tiger skins and leopard skins.

Q

Did they have to deliver these every year?

A

Yes. Probably there was no ban on hunting [tib. ri klung rtsa tsig] when they made the revenue book. So we had to send people to buy the things from India.

Q

So the [Laja](#) might have a lot of tiger and leopard skins?

A

But we had to give them out as supplies.

Q

For what purpose?

A

For making cushions. And we had to change all the cushions in the [gag](#) before the New Year on the day of the exorcism on the 29th [tib. dgu gtor]. Didn't you see the woolen cushions/rugs with tassels on the edges called Wangden Drumse [tib. dbang ldan grum ze] that were used in the [drungja](#)?

Q

Yes.

A

They were produced from Wangden Kyinkhar [tib. dkyil mkhar] in Gyantse.

Q

Did you have to change them every year?

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A

Yes.

Q

Who took away the old ones?

A

The [Laja](#) would take them back and we had to send them to some other places when the Kashag and those offices would come to get the cushions. We also had to supply all the curtains and the fringes in [Tse](#). The person in charge of the craftsmen [tib. bzo khang do dam pa] and the House Manager of the [Jokhang](#) [tib. bla brang khang gnyer] would come to the [Laja](#) because they belonged to the [Laja](#).

Q

So the tailoring was done by the craftsmen, right?

A

Yes. And one [Laja](#) officer would go to the House Construction Office [tib. ar po'i las khungs.]

Q

Was this was because the [Laja](#) supplied the materials for the construction?

A

Yes. To check whether the materials supplied were used for the right purpose was an idea of people from long ago. It was like the proverb, "The eye medicine is used for the eyes." [tib. mig sman mig phan]. There were 4 [kungö](#) in the Construction Office: one from the [Laja](#), one from the [Tseja](#), one from the [Shölpa](#) and one from the Lhasa Nyertsang.

Q

Did this office call the officials when they held the office meetings. It did not permanently meet, right?

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A

It was held permanently.

Q

Then you made the work assignments, right?

A

One [Laja](#) had to go there permanently and I went there just before the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama came. I had a hard time as we had to renovate many government houses.

Q

The Samye [tib. bsam yas] Temple was also renovated, right?

A

That was not our job. It was separate and was led by Liushar and the Shasur. Their grain and cash were all separate and we didn't need to deal with it.

I also went to the Nepalese Investigation Office, the Gorshib Lekhung, [tib. gor zhib las khungs]. At that time the Nepalese were kind of powerful and settled law cases between the people of mixed Nepalese and Tibetan ancestry who were called Khatsara [Nepalese: kha char] which means mule.

Q

How did this happen with these people of mixed ancestry?

Q

When these people had law cases like fighting, etc, it was not handled by the [mipön](#). It was settled by the Gorshib Lekhung. At that time, the Nepalese Captain would come.

Q

For example, if a household with three sons whose parents were not alive had a fight, what kind of rights would they have?

A

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First we had to check whether they were of mixed ancestry or not.

Q

I mean whatever they were. According to custom, would the elder one get a larger share.

A

If three sons had a fight, the elder would be responsible for the household and would get a larger share.

Q

And the next son would get a little less, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Do you have any kind of incident to tell me about this?

A

No, I don't.

Q

If the father and the son didn't get along well and had a fight, what would happen? Would they just drive the son out or would they give him some share?

A

They would have to give him his share.

Q

What kind of rights did the son have? What could the son claim as his right?

A

They have to give him his rights according to whatever verdict the government issued.

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Q

If the government didn't issue a verdict?

A

Since there was a law case, it was impossible not to have a verdict issued.

Q

If they didn't make an appeal to the government and settled the case internally?

A

Then they will just settle it in an appropriate manner [tib. 'grigs tshod dpag tshod].

Q

In case they made the appeal to the government?

A

Then it would be according to the verdict.

Q

As far as the people who issued the verdict, what would be their basis for issuing the verdict? It would not do if they just said you give him that much, right?

A

Both parties would write report indicating whatever property they had and they [officials] will make a calculation and issue the verdict.

Q

Did you have any government rules, like approximately what the calculation should be?

A

No, we didn't.

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Q

So did it depend on how kind the investigator would be [tib. thugs rje che los], right?

A

If it was a case between a big [tratsang](#) and a high ranking [kudrak](#) [tib. sde dpon che khag], it was decided according to the approval of the Dalai Lama. This was talk about the ownership of estates.

Q

Yes. But this also didn't have any basic policy [rules, guidelines] and depended on how kind the Investigation Committee, the Kashag and the Dalai Lama was, right?

A

Yes. We didn't have any basis, but there was a rule wherein when a household had to divide their property, they would have to offer one tenth [tib. bgos phud bcu zur] to the [lord](#) [tib. dpon khungs].

Q

How did you do that?

A

After the case was settled, and when they divided the things [material possessions], they had to give one tenth of everything to their own [lord](#).

Q

If they didn't appeal the case to the [lord](#) and settled it internally, would it be okay then?

A

Yes. Then they didn't need to give the one tenth share to the [lord](#).
[Mrs. Taring:] Shall I tell you an incident?

Q

Yes, thank you.

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A

[Mrs. Taring:] When there was a case in a family, the father was most powerful and then the oldest son. If they didn't have a son, then it would be the daughter. When I look at the situation then, it seems to me that it depended on the verdict issued by the government at that time. I don't think they had any common law for that. For example, Surkhang's father and the mother didn't get along. I know the details about this because Tsarong [Sawangchemmo](#) talked many times between them, and Surkhang's mother was called to Tsarong many times. Surkhang's son, who was then a lay official trainee (tib. [tsitrugpa](#) [rtsis phrug pa]) and who later became [Shape](#), also talked between his parents, but they still could not settle it and they appealed the government. The verdict that was issued said that the father would not get any estate but would get 200 [khe](#) of barley, 200 [dotse](#) and 4 male and female servants.

Q

Probably, the estate was the main estate [the base for serving the government] [tib. ma gzhis] of Surkhang.

A

[Mrs. Taring:] Surkhang was a very big household, but the father went with the woman nicknamed "balloon brand" [tib. lgang bu lan par]. So since the mother submitted the petition and she had sons to serve the government and because of the father's misbehavior [tib. mdzad spyod skyo po], the verdict was issued as a punishment.

Usually, when there was a law case, the relatives had the power to talk with the disputants. For example, when Sambo's father and the son got separated, the [depön](#) (son) got a good enough share of estates. Basically, [Sambo](#) had many estates.

And another right was called the "right of the mother who gave birth to the children." [tib. bu skyes a ma'i thob thang]. When Yuthok got separated, although the government didn't issue the verdict, they talked internally and Lady Yuthok got about 13 estates. One good thing was that no matter whether it was a case between couples or business matters, as long as they could settle it internally, the government wouldn't say anything.

Q

If the [miser](#) had a fight, their [lord](#) also would treat them in the same way, right?

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A

[Mrs. Taring:] It was the rule of giving one tenth to the [lord](#).

Q

If the [gerpa](#) had an internal problem, would they have to give the one tenth to the government?

A

[Mrs. Taring:] They wouldn't. What Mr. Taring said about that rule took place in the Dobtra area, which was like a nomad's area.

Q

Was this one tenth rule also in Kongpo and Lhoka?

A

When government officials died, they had to offer one whole set of clothes from the button of the [hat](#) to the saddle and tack to ask for the dedication [tib. bsngo rten]. Even if you didn't have the things, you had to try to get them from other people and offer it.

Now, I will tell you how they ran the feudal system in Tibet and how the [gerpa](#) got estates and why they served the government because of the estates. As far as we were concerned, we [Taring] didn't have estates as the basis for serving the government (tib. Shabten Phashi [zhabs brtan pha gzhis]). When I joined the government service, my father was granted leave, but later I was obliged to do the Yasor (serve as the leader of the ancient army displayed at the Mönlam). So I asked for an exemption from the Yasor obligation because I didn't have a Shabten Phashi. We had to spend about 500-600 [dotse](#) for this. So the government approved our exemption from Yasor because I didn't have a Shabten Phashi, but it said that I had to provide the Summer Picnic for the lay officials [tib. drung spyi dbyar skyid] when my turn came.

[Mrs. Taring:] Later when the prices of the things went up, they had to spend about 1,000 [dotse](#) for the Yasor obligation.

Now I will tell you about the estates [manorial estate system] since I lived in the countryside. The Chinese say that the Tibetans were slaves and the [gerpa](#) kept them by force [tib. btsan dbang], but this was not the case. I don't know about others, but as far as

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I am concerned, if the [miser](#) were slaves, we could have done whatever we wanted with them, right? But, it was not like that. Compared with the [other] [gerpa](#), we were a small household.

In Gyantse there were 600 tax units of land (gang and don) and this was divided into 6 groups [tib. tsho] with 6 group leaders called tsopön [tib. [tsho](#) dpon]. Under the 6 tsopön, there were 13 lang [tib. glang]. We had two lang: Samdrubling [tib. bsam grub gling] and Gangkar [tib. gangs dkar]. They had to divide the government taxes such as the military transportation tax [tib. dmag dod] and the barley transportation [tib. 'bru dod] tax and they divided the land to the [miser](#) in units of one 12th of a don. This was the basis of the miser's livelihood so people were not allowed to take away this land and give it to other people. This land was possessed by the household hereditarily from generation to generation. If some household couldn't manage themselves, they would ask for permission to return the land, but we could not just take it away. [In such as case] We would hold a meeting consisting of the all the [miser](#), the lang, the work supervisor [tib. las dpon] and they would discuss how much exemption of taxes should be given, and the they would give the land to another household who is capable of planting it. Anyway, they had to make it so that the tax obligations would not be delayed.

At that time, Taring was obliged to send 9 soldiers [as a tax]. Each soldier had their tax-base land for the obligation of providing a person for military service [tib. dmag rten]. The family of the soldiers got the land base. They would hold a meeting where both men and women attended and appointed a soldier who was suitable. The two lang would sit at the head and below that the work supervisor was seated, and they would appoint the soldier. Each household had their own house and land according to their condition, like the proverb, "The field mouse could carry the arrow and the bow made from tamarisk." [tib. a bras 'khyog pa'i spen ma'i mda' gzhu]. They had that permanently and their ownership would not change if one person died. It was their duty to work on our [gerpa's] estate and they also had their base land for working. When they sent the [ula](#) (corvée laborers) to work on our fields, we would give them one [daso](#) [tib. zla zo] of [tsamba](#) and [chang](#).

Q

Did you give the [tsamba](#) every day?

A

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Yes. When they took out the fertilizer and plowed the fields. I would go look at those things after I finished my school and go to look when they sowed the field and did the harvest, and also when they sheared wool. I also went to collect the sheep butter from the small nomad households.

When they said that Taring was obliged to send so many pack animals for the government barley transportation, then we have to send the animals we had and had to hire the rest of what was needed. In case the animals were not enough, the tsopön would send the animals. They kept [lag](#) [10] of donkeys and mules for doing the transportation taxes and they would transport the loads and collect the transportation fees from the [miser](#). Anyway, all the [miser](#) had their own fields and when the poor [miser](#) come to us and asked us to lend them seed and plowing animals, we would help them. At that time, it was very friendly between the [lord](#) and the [miser](#).

Some [miser](#) didn't have plowing animals, so we sent our plowing animals to plow their fields and the [miser](#) would come to plow our fields, sow the seeds and do the harvest. The [miser](#) had to work for the [chitre](#) or "outer tax" [to the government] like transporting military loads as well as the [nangtre](#) or "inner tax" for their [lord](#). They were given [tsamba](#) every day for this. Inside the Taring territory, we also have some [chöshi](#) from which we have to give religious salary to the Gyantse Pangön Chöde monastery.

Q

Did they come to get the salary?

A

We had to deliver it to them regularly.

Q

So at that time, as for the administration, the government was on the top and the next was the [gerpa](#) and then it was spread to the [miser](#), right?

A

Yes. This is about Taring only. There might be different things for the other [gerpa](#) estates.

Q

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Probably the system was the same. Anyway, in Gyantse area there were 600 [gang](#) and don, right? What do you mean by [gang](#) don? How many [khe](#) of seed is one [gang](#) and don?

A

I am not sure about this.

Q

Was [gang](#) and don the same?

A

A military [gang](#) [of land] had to send a soldier and when a soldier died, they had to send the substitute. The Military Headquarters [tib. dmag spyi khang] itself would pay salary to the soldiers, like one [khe](#) of barley per month and they also had tea and butter salary.

Q

What about their food?

A

One [khe](#) of barley was the food.

Q

This was not enough.

A

This was what they got whether it was enough or not.

Q

The regiment would not give food, right?

A

They didn't, but they had the tea and butter salary. The household who was obliged to send the soldiers, the magdag, [tib. dmag bdag], had to prepare the summer and the winter uniforms and boots for their soldier.

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Q

If you say magdag, Taring had to be that, right?

A

The common [tib. spyi pa] [miser](#) had to do that. They had to buy the boots and the leggings for the soldier and the soldier would say that this was too bad [quality]. The [miser](#) also had to serve him [chang](#) and request him to agree to what they gave him. When he got kind of drunk, then it will be okay. Although the soldiers were our own [miser](#), they would cause trouble and then make a big deal of it saying that they had been challenging the Chinese. When the communists came, I asked one of our soldiers how the red [communist] Chinese were? He said, "They have a reddish face and they were coming like a flock of sheep."

Q

Maybe, he hadn't seen them. [laughter]

A

They had seen them and also challenged them [tib. kha gtad bcag]. They were with Muja and Būgangwa [tib. sbud khang ba] and those people [in the fighting in Kham in 1950].

Q

Why did they see the Chinese as having a reddish face?

A

The Chinese had a white complexion so when they felt cold, maybe their faces became red. Anyway, they said that when the Chinese reached Chamdo, you could kill them as much as you want by using sticks because they were so tired and their food ran out and they ate boiled barley, so their stomachs got bloated and their faces were swollen. The Tibetan soldiers fought many times, but couldn't cope with them.

Q

The ones who fought were Muja's soldiers. Karchungwa fled wearing a woolen cloak.
[laughter]

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Q

When you make an endowment for the Mönlam, how much money do you need to make an endowment that would yield 3 [sho](#) in annual income?

A

You should calculate 12% interest of the capital. It was said that the prayer assembly contained was over 20,000 monks. In the beginning, the [Laja](#) kept the endowment, but there were too much endowment so we had to set up the Endowment Office [tib. theb sbyar las khungs]. [Lukhangwa](#) and Jogteng [tib. lcog steng] [Trunyichemmo](#) were the ones in charge. So after that our responsibility became much less.

Q

How did they work with the endowment?

A

They would collect the money and give loans and use the interest for the alms. They would give a notice to the sponsor that the alms will be given on whichever tea session, and they [the donor] would have go around the assembly carrying incense [tib. spos skor]. The Kashag cushion keeper would put a cushion in the [Jokhang](#) for the sponsors to be seated and we, the [Laja](#), would supply cookies for them.

Q

What about the sponsors who give additional alms [not an endowment]?

A

They would be seated in the same way. The endowment sponsors would go there every year. The Chinese Government gave one [dayan](#) as alms. That was the highest. Anyway, I was the overall person in charge (tib. jiggyab [spyi khyab]) for the last Mönlam.

Q

The Mönlam Jigyab comes from among the [Laja](#), right?

A

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No. At that time I was a [dzasa](#). I was promoted to [dzasa](#) from [laja](#) in 1955. The reason was that I had accomplished my duty of mapping and building the new palace called Tagten Mingyur Phodrang [tib. rtag brtan mi 'gyur pho brang]. I served from the beginning to the end. So it was the award for doing that.

Q

You worked on the construction of the palace while you were the [Laja](#), right?

Q

Yes.

Q

Did the expenditure for building the palace come from the [Laja](#)?

A

The expenditure was from the government.

Q

Yes, but it should come from an office, right? Was it from the [Tse](#) Treasury [namgan tib. rnam gan] or the Dalai Lama's Treasury in [Norbulinga](#) (tib. dzöbug [mdzod sbug])?

A

Probably, it was from the dzöbug Treasury.

Q

In case the [Laja](#) didn't have enough money or rice and flour, what happened?

A

This was impossible. But later the butter for the butter lamps had a little bit of shortage.

Q

If you didn't have enough butter, where would you have to borrow it from?

A

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We bought vegetable oil imported from India. But now we had to pay 18 Rs for a half kilo. When I remember those days how we used it, it was really unbelievable. When they made the butter loads wrapped in leather, first they would knead the butter to squeeze out any excess water, and then wrap it with wet yak or ox skin and dry it. So the butter got squeezed when the skin became dry. When they rolled the edge of the skin and stitched it, it became virtually airtight.

Q

When it became airtight, the butter didn't spoil, right?

A

Yes.

Q

You told me that the butter became like wood.

A

When we built the building, there were 2-3 loads of butter under the old house that had become like wood. There was no grease at all left.

Q

Maybe 1,000 years had passed.

A

Maybe it was from the time when the Tibetan Government was founded.

Q

Then 2,500 years must have passed.

A

I am not sure about 2,500 years, but definitely 1,500 years had passed. And the fish bones were useless so I asked for them and used it for my flowers and apple trees as fertilizer.

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Q

It must have been a very good fertilizer.

A

Yes, the bones were good.

Q

You worked as the [Laja](#) for 18 years. This was very long time.

A

Since the Tibetan Government started, nobody had been the [Laja](#) head for 18 years. Chagdam Urgyenla [tib. phyag dam pa o rgyan lags] was there during the Reting war. He has the details to tell you about this.

Q

Urgyenla told me that he was the Chagdampa for 12 Mönlams. So you were there during that period. Who would come to the [Laja](#) to get the supplies for the Mönlam? Did you have to give the supplies to the kitchen [tib. rung khang chen mo]? Or did you give it to the Mönlam Jigyab.

A

We gave it directly to the kitchen.

Q

Did the [Shengo](#) Shingnyer [tib. zhang go shing gnyer] come to the [Laja](#) to get supplies?

A

No, he would not come, but the tea maker (tib. Jama [ja ma]) would come.

Q

Did you give them supplies daily?

A

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Yes. We would give it on alternate days. Rice and the flattened barley [tib. nas chag] was used alternately for the porridge. We could not serve rice daily because Tibet did not grow rice. So rice porridge was served as the better one on the days like when the Dalai Lama's alms [tib. spyen bsal sku 'gyed] were given.

Q

It was the thick rice porridge with big pieces of meat, right?

A

Yes.

Q

I heard that the tea servers, the olo, would grab the meat and take them away from the storage place called Bugtsang [tib. sbug tshang].

Q

Yes. It was regarded as nothing because there was too much meat. There were about 1,000 carcasses of meat.

Q

How many carcasses did you use for a year?

A

There were several thousands. They mostly came from Gyantse and Shigatse.

Q

Altogether, how many carcasses were used?

A

I don't remember the exact number. Anyway, for each porridge, one basket full of chopped meat was used. The basket could hardly be lifted by a person. Probably, 11-12 carcasses were used.

Q

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So this was used twice a day, right?

A

Yes, and the Mönlam was 21 days.

Q

And there were 12 days for the Tsogjö, right?

A

Yes.

Q

The endowment money was loaned for the interest. The [Laja](#) wouldn't use it for doing other things like for trade?

A

No.

Q

Wasn't it allowed to do that or wasn't there any tradition to do that?

A

We didn't have that tradition.

Q

In case there was nobody taking the loans what happened?

A

You didn't need to worry about not having people to take the loans because the 12% interest was low. Usually, the loan interest was 20% [tib. bcu skyed] and even 24% [tib. bcu gnyis skyed].

Q

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There was no service charge and you take the money at the 12% interest and loan it at 20%,right?

A

Yes.

Q

The monasteries also took loans, right?

A

Yes and also the traders and the [gerpa](#) also took loans.

Q

Did they have to leave something as pawn?

A

They needed three guarantors. Some also left pawn.

Q

There may not have been many people leaving pawn, right?

A

Yes. Most of them had guarantors.

Q

The guarantor was for paying the interest on time, right?

A

Yes.

Q

When they took the loans, would they pay by the year or what?

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A

Yes. They had to pay the interest every year.

Q

For how many years could they keep the capital?

A

They could keep it for as many years as they wanted. But when you missed paying the interest, they would pursue it and also would tell them to return the capital because they had to give alms to the monks [from this].

Q

If you don't miss paying the interest, they won't take back the capital, right?

A

Yes.

Q

For example, [Kapshöba](#) might have taken a lot of loans?

A

Yes. And Doring [tib. rdo ring] also took a lot of loans though it was one of the biggest [aristocratic] households. Every year they had trouble [paying] so when someone requested the position of [dzongpön](#), they would go to the [Laja](#) or the [Trapchi](#) Lekhung to take loans to repay the other loans. Then they would go to the [dzong](#) and embezzle a lot. This is how they did the kind of business. They were also allowed to send an acting [dzongpön](#). This was not good.

Q

[You mean] Then they send an acting [dzongpön](#) and they stayed in Lhasa? If so, did they need to attend the ceremonies?

A

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For example, I was appointed as [Tö](#) Garpön [tib. stod sgar dpon]. I didn't need to go in person and I leased it to whoever paid the highest lease.

Q

What if there would be some trouble?

A

The Garpön himself had to handle it.

Q

While you were staying in Lhasa, was it a vacation or did you have to go to work?

A

I could enjoy myself and stay in Lhasa.

Q

This was about leasing a [dzong](#) and estates, right?

A

Yes. Let me explain the order of the ranks of the [tsidrung](#) and the lay officials. The Dalai Lama is of course the supreme leader [tib. gong du phud]. Next to him is the prime minister (tib. [silön](#) [srid blon], then shape, [dzasa](#), [theiji](#), [talama](#), [khenche](#), [khenjung](#), [rimshi](#), senamapa, [letsenpa](#) and the ordinary officials, kyüma [tib. dkyus ma]. As for how these ranks are visibly represented by their [hat](#) button/decorations; the prime minister had pearls, the shape had rubies [tib. pad rag], the [dzasa](#) had coral, the [rimshi](#) had turquoise, the [letsenpa](#) had lapis lazuli [tib. [mu](#) men] and then they had the shell [tib dong], and then they just had a piece of cotton as the [hat](#) decoration. [laughter]

Q

Who had the shells?

A

The honorary ranks that were usually given to the craftsmen and [rupön](#) and [gyagpön](#) called [trungtog](#) [tib. drung gtogs].

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Q

How did they have the cotton?

Q

They just put some cotton in the hole of the round fox cap [tib. wa gir]. I think there were 7 different [hat](#) buttons/decorations.

Q

What [hat](#) button would the [sitsab](#) and the [katsab](#) have?

A

They had the same button as the prime minister and the kalön.

Q

What was the difference between a [dzasa](#) and the [theiji](#)?

A

They both had the same coral on their hats. As for the monk officials, they did not have differences in their costume to show their ranks. One could not tell their rank from just looking at them. For example, all had brocade on the sleeves of their upper garment (tib. götö [gos stod]) and had brocade hems on their shawls (tib. chadru chabtö [cha gru chab stod]) and wore a yellow cap worn when riding horses (tib. tasha [rta zhwa]).

Q

The chadru chabtö probably had a difference in whether the brocade was colored or not, right?

A

No, there was no difference.

Q

Wasn't there a difference regarding whether they wore the big yellow garment (dagozi [ch. da gua zi]) and the rainbow boots (tib. jachen ['ja' chen])?

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A

Lay officials above the rank of [rimshi](#) wore red rainbow boots and those lower than [rimshi](#) wore maroon rainbow boots.

Q

I think the [talama](#) wore yellow boots.

A

At the head of the [rimshi](#), the Tsipön would be seated [highest among the [rimshi](#) at functions]. The [Laja](#) would be seated next below that. The tseja would not sit outside at the [trungja](#). They would sit below the [khenche](#) and the [khenjung](#).

Q

Were they [tsidrung](#)?

A

There were both the [tsidrung](#) and the lay officials [in the tseja and laja]. At that time, old man [Shölkhang](#) did this.

Q

The tseja was regarded higher, right?

A

Not really. They belonged to the [tsidrung](#) category. Their office was in [Tse](#) and it was also called the Trelde [tib. 'phral bde] which meant they could give supplies right away from there.

Q

So the [Tseja](#) was the branch of the [Laja](#), right?

A

Yes. The [Laja](#) was the main treasury, the [chandzö](#) of the government. It was also a revenue office because they kept all the money.

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Q

Were there any special incidents while you were the [Laja](#) [one of the [Laja](#) heads]?

A

There was not any special incident and the four of us [Laja](#) heads came at the same time. During the Mönlam, the four [Laja](#) had to serve food to the [Laja](#) and the staff which was cooked at home and brought there. The former [Laja](#) might have cooked the food in the [Laja](#) office and built a stove on the top floor, but they didn't put down a floor of earth well under the stove, so a fire burned the rafters underneath and the fire almost burned the whole [Jokhang](#). Because of that, all the [Laja](#) were demoted.

Q

Who were the former ones?

A

One was Thupten Dawa [tib. thub bstan zla ba] and there was another old [tsidrung](#). The replacements for the old ones were Tarkhang [tib. tar khang], Liushar [tib. sne'u shar], Jogtre [tib. lcog bkras] and me.

Q

You mean the Liushar [dzasa](#)?

A

Yes.

Q

How long did Liushar stay there?

A

Liushar stayed for quite a long time and then became a [katsab](#).

Q

How about Tarkhang?

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A

He remained there until his death.

Q

When those portfolios changed, there wasn't any term of office in years, right?

A

Yes. If you want to get a inner position [tib. nang gi las tshan] in Lhasa or an outer position [tib. phyi'i las tshan] in a [dzong](#) or estate, you had to request that.

Q

Including the position of shape also, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Probably, you can't request the position of prime minister?

A

I don't think so. The era of the old government was kind of a good one [tib. bskal pa bzang po], but it was also characterized by having kind of long days with nothing to do to pass the time [tib. nyi ma ring po].

Q

If you didn't request another position and if you were not demoted, then you would just remain there, right?

A

Yes, but they would also transfer you to another job.

Q

Even if you didn't request it?

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A

Yes.

Q

You won't get promoted, but could be transferred, right?

A

Yes. And sometimes they would promote you.

Q

Even if you didn't request that, you could get promoted, right?

A

Yes.

Q

As far as you are concerned, you were the in charge of the construction of the Tagten Mingyur Palace while you were the [Laja](#), right?

A

Yes.

Q

How did you get promoted while you were the in charge of the construction?

A

I was the one who made the map [plans] of the palace. In the beginning, I drew the map on paper and I submitted it to the Kashag, but they couldn't figure out how it would look [when done] so I made three different three-dimensional [tib. blos bslangs] designs where they could see all the stone steps and the pillars. So they said that this was very good. Finally, this was reported to the Dalai Lama and he chose one from among the three designs. The outer shape was like a standard Tibetan design, but inside, there were sitting rooms and the bedrooms were modern design. The wood planks were transported from

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Kongpo and they were made in the hair braid style. We applied dye and then applied oil and frankincense [tib. spos dkar] to make it shining.

Q

Why didn't you polish it?

A

We made a natural polish by boiling frankincense in oil. And we pounded [arka](#) for some floors and let it dry for three days and then made it shiny by polishing it with [tsamba](#) dough and then applying a reddish vegetable dye [tib. btsod] and a yellow vegetable dye [tib. [chu](#) rtsa ?]. Then we also used the frankincense and oil mixture to polish it finally we cleaned it stepping on pieces of woolen material [tib. rdog 'physis](and sliding one's feet on the floor surface to shine it). Then it was finished.

Q

How much did it cost to build this palace?

A

I don't remember that. I went to Kolcutta to procure the furniture that needed to be bought from India. My late father offered a round stair [tib. sgor sgor] made from cast iron and it was used at the back side of the palace. At that time, we made cement pillars and a water tank and used a pumping machine to draw the water from a huge copper basin like a pond [tib. rdzing] where the water was carried by mules. So in the palace we had both hot and the cold water. The hot water pipe went up through the kitchen stove. In the [Trapchi](#) Lekhung, we stuffed the pipe with sand and made the curves in it by heating it.

Q

All the bathrooms had the running water pipes, right?

A

Yes.

Q

How many bedrooms were there?

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Q

There was the Dalai Lama's bedroom [tib. mtshan gzim khang] and a prayer room and a room for retreats.

Q

This was part of the bedroom, right?

A

Yes. And there was a meeting room and an office. Downstairs there was a waiting room and rooms where the [bodyguard] soldiers stayed. At the northwest side of the palace, there was a prayer room in which there were wall paintings of the two main disciples and the six disciples of the Buddha [tib. rgyan drug mchog gnyis] and the main painting was the Lord Buddha which was painted like a live person not like ordinary thangka paintings. The artist was [Amdo](#) Champa [tib. byams pa].

Q

After all this, you were promoted to the rank of [dzasa](#) as a reward, right?

A

Yes.

Q

You didn't get anything like an estates, right?

A

Yes.

Q

What was your job after getting promoted?

A

It was then 1956-57 when there were the disturbances. I served in the Private Office of the Dalai Lama [tib. sku sger yig tshang] and also took care of the trees around the new

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palace. I made all the garden plans. I also took all the photos when the Dalai Lama went to China and came back, and when the Dalai Lama took the [geshe](#) exam [tib. grwa skor mtshan bzhes]. Not only did I shoot movies, I also made 6 albums by sticking Bhutanese paper and polishing it with si beads [tib. gzi]. The cover of the album was yellow brocade with cotton padding. So there was a lot of work. I also took photos when the Dalai Lama gave many teachings on the way to China. All of these were left in Tibet except those of his [geshe](#) exam.

Q

I remember you shot movies when the Dalai Lama gave the Kalachakra Initiation [tib. dus 'khor dbang chen] in [Norbulinga](#). So your position was attached to the Private Office, right?

A

Yes.

Q

At that time, the Private Office was not regarded highly like nowadays, right?

A

Yes, but there were letter communications then.

Q

Government affairs were not dealt with by the Private Office, right?

A

They were dealt with by the Foreign Office. But the private letters of the Dalai Lama were done by the Private Office.

Q

The internal petitions from the Kashag, etc., would not come to the Private Office, right?

A

Yes.

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Q

These went to the ga (tse ga), right?

A

The Kashag would make the draft and submit it for approval.

Q

How would they submit it? They didn't send it to the Private Office, right?

A

The Private Office had nothing to do with the petitions.

Q

To whom would the Kashag submit the petitions?

A

Directly to the Dalai Lama.

Q

The Kashag would not visit the Dalai Lama. They probably had to go to the [Tse](#) ga.

A

If the Kashag went directly to the Dalai Lama's room they would discuss and make the decision right away. If not, the Dalai Lama would tell them to leave the petitions there, and the approval would come down through the [drönyerchemmo](#).

Q

What if they had to remind the Dalai Lama that some documents were pending?

A

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Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

The [drönyerchemmo](#) was there to remind him. The letters from abroad were from religious organizations send to the Dalai Lama privately. There wasn't any official correspondence.